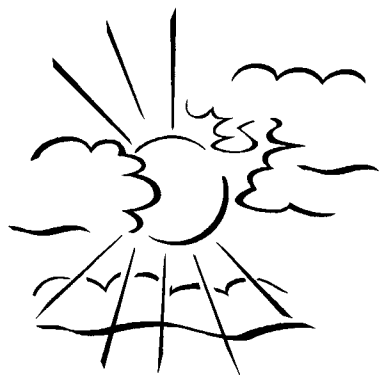


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Mother Gets Call About Infant In Amber Alert

6-Month-Old Believed To Be With Non-Custodial Father

POSTED: 7:08 am EST January 9, 2006

UPDATED: 12:41 pm EST January 9, 2006

The mother of a 6-month-old girl, who was reportedly kidnapped from her baby sitter's Hamtramck home Sunday, received a phone call about the infant's whereabouts Monday. An Amber Alert was issued for LaSepia Rankins (pictured, right), who was taken at gunpoint by a man believed to be her non-custodial father, Michael Maxwell, according to police. The infant's mother, whose name was not available, said she spoke with the child's father Monday morning and he said he was in Indianapolis with LaSepia, Local 4 reported. The mother said she has no reason to believe he will harm their daughter, but wants her returned home safely.

Hamtramck police were working with Indianapolis police on the investigation.

LaSepia is described as black, 21 inches tall and 15 pounds. She was last seen wearing a yellow sleeper and pink jacket.

Maxwell is described as black, 5 feet 8 inches tall, 160 pounds with brown eyes, braided black hair and a tattoo on his stomach, according to police. A description of a second man who was reportedly with Maxwell at the time of the alleged abduction was not available.

Police believe Maxwell was driving a two-door silver car. Police initially believed he was heading to Indiana or Kentucky.

Anyone with information on the case should contact Hamtramck police at (313) 876-7803.

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Police: Baby's Kidnapping Was Made Up

Custodial Fight Between Parents May Be At Issue

POSTED: 5:06 pm EST January 9, 2006

There are new developments in the case of a 6-month-old girl, who was reportedly kidnapped from her Hamtramck home Sunday.

An Amber Alert was issued for LaSepia Rankins (pictured, right), who was reportedly taken at gunpoint from a babysitter by a man believed to be her non-custodial father, Michael Maxwell. It was reported that Maxwell had taken the baby to Indianapolis.

The babysitter, identified as Erica Derbin, now admits she made the kidnapping story up to get the baby "out of the whole environment," she told Local 4, referring to the home where the child lived with her mother. Derbin, 20, shares the home in the 11400 block of Moran with the baby's mother, Haqikah Rankins, 28.

Police say there were some discrepancies that led them to believe the story was made up.

The baby is now in child protective custody in Indianapolis. It is unclear if anyone will be charged in the case.

"It sounds like this is going to be some kind of dispute between Mom and Dad, more of a custody issue," said Hamtramck Police Detective Mike Szymanski.

Pair with cocaine, child arraigned

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Scott Hagen
shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

Even though he couldn't see her, Linda Holmes waved to her son, who was wearing the standard orange jumpsuit while appearing by video Monday from the county jail for his arraignment. She described him as a good man who takes care of his two sons, but who was in the wrong place at the wrong time when he was arrested last week with a child sitting on 63 packets of powder cocaine in the backseat of the black Cadillac he was driving.

Charles Holmes, 30, of Albion, and the passenger in the car, 29-year-old Arthur Jones, of Detroit, were arraigned in District Court on charges of cocaine possession with intent to deliver and second-degree child abuse.

The child was not theirs. A friend, the father of the child, placed the 3-year-old in the car and asked the pair to drive him to family members in Albion. But police were looking for the black Cadillac on Friday morning following an incident earlier at Sauk Trail Post on Prospect Street where at least one shot was fired.

Linda Holmes said her son was unaware of the drugs in the car.

"Charles just got mixed up with the wrong crowd," she said after his arraignment as she started to cry.

"He's not a bad guy at all. He's not a bad kid, he just made a mistake."

The mistake could be costly. Holmes and Jones face up to 20 years in prison for the cocaine charge, and up to four years in prison for the child-abuse charge.

Magistrate Fred Bishop leveled a \$200,000 bond for each man and scheduled their preliminary exams for Jan. 23 in front of District Judge Charles Fallahee.

Both men had previous run-ins with the police. Holmes served two years of probation for resisting arrest in Calhoun County.

Jones served time in prison for two convictions of drug possession with intent to deliver and was out on parole when Jackson police arrested him Friday morning.

Police are still investigating whether the boy's father, who placed him in the car according to a police report, had anything to do with the cocaine, about 8 grams worth with a street value estimated at \$800.

"We haven't seen from the police reports with respect to the father's involvement with the cocaine," Chief Assistant Prosecutor Mark Blumer said. "All we know is we found two guys driving a child who was sitting on 63 packages of cocaine."

For Linda Holmes, the story is different.

"Wrong place. Wrong time. Wrong people," she said.

Yates pleads innocent by reason of insanity in drowning deaths of her children

By PAM EASTON
Associated Press Writer

HOUSTON (AP) - Andrea Yates pleaded innocent by reason of insanity in the drowning deaths of her children Monday as she made her first court appearance since her 2002 capital murder convictions were overturned.

State District Judge Belinda Hill set a March 20 trial date.

Yates, 41, may remain in the custody of the Harris County Sheriff's Department until she is retried for the deaths of three of her five children. Her attorney, George Parnham, wants Yates sent to Rusk State Hospital until the new trial.

Until last week, Yates had been imprisoned at East Texas' Skyview Prison Unit, a psychiatric prison. She appeared in court Monday wearing glasses and an orange jail jumpsuit.

During her original trial, jurors rejected Yates' insanity defense and found her guilty for the 2001 deaths of three of the children drowned in the family bathtub: 7-year-old Noah, 5-year-old John and the youngest, 6-month-old Mary.

Evidence was presented about the drownings of the other two children - Paul, 3, and Luke, 2 - but Yates was not charged in their deaths.

Yates was convicted of two capital murder charges and sentenced to life in prison.

Her convictions were overturned last January by a state appeals court because of testimony by the state's expert witness, forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz. He testified that, shortly before Yates killed her five children, television's 'Law and Order' series broadcast an episode about a woman with postpartum depression who drowned her children. No such episode ever existed.

'Although no one relishes the idea of going through another trial, our focus will remain on seeking justice for Noah, John, Paul, Luke and Mary,' prosecutor Kaylynn Williford said Monday.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys said plea deal negotiations were ongoing but they agreed not to discuss them publicly. Both sides said they are preparing for a trial.

To prove insanity in Texas, a defendant must prove she suffered from a severe mental disease or defect and did not know her actions were wrong.

January 10, 2006

Grawn man charged with sex crimes

FROM STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY - A Grawn man is being charged with fondling an underage girl in two separate incidents.

An arrest warrant was authorized for Jose Antonio Martinez, 43, on two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct for alleged incidents involving a girl under 13 at his home in January 2005 and at her home last August.

Martinez allegedly touched the victim last January while the two watched television while covered with a blanket at his Grawn home, according to a complaint filed in 86th District Court. Grand Traverse County sheriff's officials said a second incident occurred in August at the girl's home, when Martinez again allegedly fondled her.

If convicted, Martinez could face up to 15 years in prison.

January 10, 2006

Man charged as cyber stalker

Allegedly used the Internet to 'terrorize' girl

By IAN C. STOREY

Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - Police believe a local man used his computer to "stalk" an underage girl repeatedly on the Internet and at her Traverse City home.

Felony charges were filed Friday in 86th District Court against Robbie Brooks Ohlendorf, 35, of Traverse City, who allegedly used his computer to "stalk" and "terrorize" a 16-year-old girl.

Ohlendorf is charged with stalking a minor, two counts of using a computer to commit a crime, and possession of child pornography.

Ohlendorf allegedly began contacting the girl in May 2005 on the computer; she repeatedly told him to stop, according to court records.

Grand Traverse County sheriff's officials said Ohlendorf allegedly changed his online user name in order to contact her after she blocked him on her computer.

As Ohlendorf allegedly continued to stalk the girl in cyberspace, detectives said he also dropped a CD off at her residence.

Last month, sheriff's Detective Todd Heller interviewed Ohlendorf, who allegedly admitted he continued to "stalk" the teen despite her repeated requests for him to stop.

Heller obtained a search warrant for Ohlendorf's residence, where he allegedly found a CD containing a video file of an "adolescent female" engaged in various sexual activities, according to court records.

Ohlendorf faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted on the four felony charges.

Prison time awaits man who took nude photos

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Paul Janczewski

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A Fenton man faces prison time when he is sentenced for taking nude photos of a girl and delivering cocaine.

Mark A. Goff, 48, pleaded guilty to taking the pictures of the girl, then 17, and posting them on his computer and also of having a quantity of crack cocaine.

He will be sentenced Feb. 6 before Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille and faces a minimum of 4 to 7 years in prison and a maximum of 20 years.

In exchange for his plea, prosecutors dismissed other similar counts related to the nude pictures, as well as one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, and felony firearms.

Goff's attorney, Rick Ponsetto, said Goff took the plea because the victim earlier testified that Goff touched her during the picture episode, a criminal sexual conduct charge that could have landed him in prison for life.

Police and prosecutors said the incidents involving the girl occurred between February and May in his Fenton apartment.

The victim earlier testified she moved into Goff's Fenton apartment but left, returning on weekends to ingest cocaine.

She allowed Goff to take nude photos of her after he pressured her. She said during one episode, she was sexually assaulted. Several weeks later, she saw her pictures on Goff's computer.

Police raided Goff's apartment in June and found a quantity of cocaine.

He also faces a drug case in Livingston County.

His son, Mark A. Goff II, 19, now of Grand Rapids, recently pleaded guilty to use of cocaine and ecstasy, 90-day misdemeanors.

Macomb County

Private home is big help in Macomb sex predator sting

January 7, 2006

BY DAN CORTEZ
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel has seen some of the online conversations that transpire between adult men and his deputies posing as girls in chat rooms.

The men, more often than not, want to have sex with girls who aren't even old enough to drive. "You'd be appalled at some of the conversations," Hackel said Friday. "The conversations are very graphic."

That's why Hackel is trying new ways to catch sexual predators and keep others from setting up encounters with underage girls in Macomb County.

Over the past two weeks, the sheriff's office has been using a private home in Macomb Township. Reserve officers posing as underage girls in online chats set up meetings at the home. When suspects arrive, they are arrested.

The sting operation, which was announced at a news conference Friday, has resulted in the arrest of three men since Dec. 21 -- Shane Griffin, 35, of Ypsilanti; Erik Bacheldor, 26, of Warren, and Ian Ormanian, 23, of Lincoln Park.

All three face several charges, including communicating with another to commit a crime; sexually abusive activity and accosting a child for immoral purposes. Each could face more than 20 years in prison if convicted.

In the past, officers would arrange encounters in public places such as parks or parking lots. Hackel surmised that suspects might get suspicious that whenever the girl wanted to meet in a public place, the police might be involved. Taking a cue from a story he saw on NBC-TV's "Dateline" news magazine, he decided to try a private home.

"They start to see a pattern," Hackel said of always meeting in public places. "Now they even want to hear the girl's voice over the phone. So we have some reservists who happen to sound like young girls."

Mike Rizzo, owner of Express Builders, supplied the home for the operation. The model home -- less than a mile from Hackel's residence -- is kept up to look like someone lives there.

Hackel said the suspects, not the reservists posing as girls, are the ones who ask for sex.

"We don't push it," he said. "We're very aware of entrapment."

Rizzo, a reservist with the sheriff's office, said neighbors of the home should not worry. Instead, he said, the stings should make people feel assured that the sheriff's office is being proactive.

And parents should be keeping an eye on whom their children talk to online.

"I can almost guarantee my customers that Macomb County is safe," Rizzo said.

Hackel said several more builders and other citizens have offered homes to use in sting operations.

"This is real. This stuff happens," he said. "Parents need to be aware of what their kids are doing online."

Contact **DAN CORTEZ** at 586-469-1827 or cortez@freepress.com.

Changing a child's life an hour at a time

By SEAN HILLIARD / Niles Daily Star

Tuesday, January 10, 2006 10:41 AM EST

NILES - An hour and a half, spread over a month's time, is all it takes for one adult to change a child's life.

That was the message of the hour at this week's Niles-Buchanan Rotary Club luncheon, held Monday at the Millennium.

In fact, this is the message of the entire month of January, according to Kathryn S. Rossow, executive director of the Volunteer Center of Southwest Michigan. January is National Mentoring Month.

"Mentoring is where you can make the most difference with the least amount of time," Rossow said.

The Lunch Buddies Program is a prime example of this philosophy. Through the program, a qualified adult volunteers to spend three of his or her lunch hours over a month-long period at school with a child. The lunch can last between a half-hour and an hour. During this period, the adult will read with the child, play a game or work together on homework.

Youths mentored in this way are 46 percent less likely to use drugs, 59 percent more likely to get better grades and 73 percent more likely to raise their life goals, according to the Volunteer Center.

"Volunteering is a wonderful, wonderful experience," Rossow added.

The Volunteer Center also has a fundraiser coming up on June 17 called the "Human Race."

It involves a series of certified events: a 10K race, a 5K run/walk and a 1 mile fun walk. Groups participating will raise money for their specific organization, and 10 percent of the money raised will go to the Volunteer Center.

In addition to mentoring youths, the Volunteer Center works with a different group of people: managers of not-for-profit organizations.

Through 13 two-hour sessions, managers will receive both level one and level two boardsmanship training for a fee.

They will also take a certification test at the sessions' conclusion. During the sessions, the managers will receive training in subjects such as balancing work and life and what baby boomers expect from mentoring compared to what other generations expect, according to Rossow.

Rossow has been executive director of the Volunteer Center since 1977. Her column appears in the Niles Daily Star on Tuesdays.

The Volunteer Center serves the three counties of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren. It has offices in Niles and St. Joseph.

For more information, or to become a mentor, call (800)VOLUNTEER (865-8683). Residents of Niles can call 683-5464.

FIM grant to pay at-risk kids' tuition

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Kim Crawford

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FLINT - The Ruth Mott Foundation is giving the Flint Institute of Music a three-year grant of \$460,000 for tuition-free music and dance classes and programs for at-risk children, the FIM announced Monday.

The idea behind the grant, which will support music and dance programs for children, is research that suggests involvement in music and arts helps kids to think and learn, and therefore do better in school and life.

FIM officials say more than a third of the 3,000 students enrolled in classes and programs at its Flint School of Performing Arts take part in 20 different tuition-free outreach programs including music, reading and dance sessions.

The grant will also support a new "Saturday School" program starting in the fall for students and families who wish to study dance and music on a longer term.

While the students are in classes, "Saturday School" family members will be able to participate in seminars and workshops about volunteerism, reading and help with financial aid applications.

Seniors aided in Medicare drug plan changes

January 7, 2006

BY KATIE MERX
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Isaac Penson signed up for a Medicare prescription drug plan before the new year with help from someone at his church, but he didn't realize he'd have to pay a \$250 out-of-pocket deductible before the plan he chose would pay for any drugs or that the plan he chose wouldn't cover his blood-pressure medicine.

The 84-year-old Detroit resident doesn't have \$250. And he ran out of his blood-pressure medicine, Norvasc, earlier this week. He takes it to keep his high blood pressure from causing a heart attack, stroke or kidney problems.

The cash price for 30 Norvasc tablets is about \$50. He can't afford that, either.

Now, with help from the Michigan Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program this week, Penson was able to change to a plan he can afford.

The new plan doesn't have a \$250 deductible and allows him to fill each of his prescriptions for a \$15 co-pay. The catch is that he can't use the new plan until next month.

Penson is one of a large number of seniors who are going without vital medicines or paying for them out of pocket because of glitches in the new Medicare drug benefit system and confusion over how it works. The good news, though, is there is time and assistance to help seniors switch to a plan that works for them.

The Medicare drug benefit, which took effect on Jan. 1, is supposed to improve access to prescription drugs for seniors and disabled people by helping them pay for their medication.

Enrollment without a penalty of higher premiums continues through May 15.

It's the first time Medicare has offered to help pay for prescription drugs.

More than 1.5 million Michiganders and 40 million other Americans are eligible for the new benefit. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services says more than half of all eligible people nationwide have enrolled.

But implementation of the new benefit has Medicare beneficiaries and pharmacists twirling in a sea of confusion and frustration.

"Some people with Medicare -- seniors and people with disabilities -- are experiencing challenges in that they selected a plan and didn't realize it had a \$250 deductible," said Mary Johnson, executive director of the Michigan Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program.

More than half of the new Medicare drug plans carry \$250 deductibles.

Other enrollees believed the plans they signed up for covered their specific medications, but now are finding the prescriptions aren't covered or that their doctors have to file a special application before the drug plan will pay for them.

The new benefits have overwhelmed many enrollees because they've had to choose from among dozens of plans provided by a slew of private companies. Each plan covers a different mix of drugs, is affiliated with its own network of pharmacies, and charges its own monthly premiums and co-pays.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services reports that more than 1 million people have received prescriptions through the drug benefit since it took effect on Sunday.

But pharmacists report that many people who believe they enrolled haven't been so lucky. Many people enrolled before the end of the year, but never received confirmation or a benefits card, pharmacists said.

In many cases, couples that sent their applications in on the same day find that one spouse already has received a benefits card and the other hasn't.

And the national computer system that's supposed to verify Medicare drug plan enrollment is so overloaded that pharmacists have been unable to verify benefits for many of their patients, said Al Knaak, head pharmacist and a part owner at **Village Pharmacy II** in Ann Arbor.

Pharmacists also report that they're having difficulty getting through by computer or telephone to the insurance companies running the drug plans.

"The wait on line with some of the insurance companies is up to 30 minutes now," Knaak said.

"Sometimes you can't get through. It's becoming more chaotic as the week goes on."

"Our call volume has gone up during the course of the week," said Louanne Bakk, director of access and benefits assistance at the Area Agency on Aging in Southfield. The agency has been fielding calls from dozens of seniors and disabled people trying to navigate the new Medicare drug benefit.

Village Pharmacy, like many small and large pharmacies, is providing patients with two or three days of medication while they attempt to verify benefits.

"Sometimes if we call first thing in the morning or late in the evening, we're able to get through," Knaak said. If they're lucky, the patients receive their card before they run out of the emergency supply, he said. That's the easiest way to verify enrollment.

Walgreen Co. spokeswoman Tiffani Bruce said the system was overwhelmed by the initial demand, but the situation seemed to be improving by the second half of the week.

"I'm really looking for it to get better next week," Knaak said.

Contact **KATIE MERX** at 313-222-8762 or kmerx@freepress.com.

Avoiding panic

- Getting help

If you have a problem or need to sign up for a Medicare drug plan:

- * Call the federal Medicare assistance hotline at 800-633-4227.
- * Or call 800-803-7174 to reach a Michigan volunteer counselor.
- * The deadline for signing up for a Medicare drug plan without price penalties is May 15.
- * Coverage began Jan. 1.
- * Patients who enroll in a Medicare drug plan in January will be eligible for coverage beginning Feb. 1.

Getting your MEDICINE

- * If you have received your card, take it to the pharmacy.

If you don't have a card, take photo identification and at least one of the following items: The letter that said you are enrolled in a plan, the name of the plan, a copy of your application for the plan.

Seniors' drugs held up in plan switch

Medicare won't pay in some cases

January 10, 2006

BY KATIE MERX
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Nearly a quarter million of Michigan's most vulnerable seniors and disabled residents are going without their medications or paying more for them under the new Medicare drug benefit.

"The stories are heart-wrenching," said Mary Johnson, executive director of the Michigan Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program. "People don't understand the plans they are in. They are confused. Some of the pharmacists are confused."

The lowest-income Medicare beneficiaries got their prescription drugs through Medicaid before Jan. 1, when Medicare didn't have a prescription-drug program. Those beneficiaries are known as dual-eligibles and with the advent of the Medicare prescription-drug program 10 days ago, they now must get their prescription drugs through Medicare.

About 240,000 Michigan Medicare beneficiaries and 6 million other Americans fall into the dual-eligible category.

Most of the dual-eligible Medicare beneficiaries didn't choose the drug plans they are in. Instead, the government randomly assigned those patients to drug plans without consideration for whether the plans covered the medications recipients need.

Many patients don't realize that the plans don't cover their drugs until they arrive at the pharmacy to pick up their prescriptions. Others find out that the pharmacy they routinely use isn't in the network of the plan to which they were assigned.

"We had a patient in today who tried to fill a prescription for a product that was covered under the patient's Medicaid, but Medicare isn't covering it," said pharmacist Harvey Schmidt, president of **Schmidt & Sons Pharmacy** in Tecumseh, Dundee, Clinton and Blissfield.

"That experience is not unique," said Louanne Bakk, director of access and benefits assistance at the **Area Agency on Aging** office in Southfield.

And it's distressing for patients, she said. On Medicaid, a patient may have paid a \$1 or \$3 co-payment for a prescription that now might cost them more than \$100. Even if it now costs the patient \$30, that cost could be prohibitive for dual-eligible beneficiaries, counselors said.

It's just one of the many frustrating and confusing problems that patients and pharmacists have encountered this week with the launch of the Medicare prescription-drug program.

The drug program is supposed to improve Medicare enrollees' access to prescription drugs. But so far, it's been full of glitches.

Many Medicare beneficiaries complain there is no record of their enrollments, and pharmacists complain that they are having difficulty getting through to insurance companies and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to resolve problems and verify benefits.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services report that they and their contractors are working to resolve the problems.

Additionally, they've created safeguards to ensure dual-eligible patients get their prescription drugs regardless of the plan they're in.

"They are entitled to a one-time, one-month supply of a prescription drug," if they were auto-enrolled in a plan that doesn't cover their medication, Bakk said.

That provision is intended to give a patient time to pursue a covered drug or change to a plan that covers his or her drug.

Dual-eligible patients are allowed to change the drug plan they are in as often as they want. But changes won't take effect until the first of the next month.

And the safeguards don't do patients any good if they and their pharmacists aren't aware of them, Bakk said.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services held a conference call with state Medicare directors on Monday in an effort to make sure all state offices and pharmacies are aware of the provisions following reports that many seniors have left pharmacies full of frustration and without their necessary prescriptions.

Many dual-eligible Medicare patients are among the least able to navigate the confusing maze of rules in the new Medicare drug plans.

The **Kaiser Family Foundation** reports that those low-income citizens that fall in the dual-eligible category are among the most vulnerable and highest-cost beneficiaries in both Medicare and Medicaid. They are also more likely than other Medicare beneficiaries to have chronic conditions.

Contact **KATIE MERX** at 313-222-8762 or kmerx@freepress.com.

How to get help

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Getting your drugs

- If you have received your card, take it to the pharmacy.

If you don't have a card, take photo identification and at least one of the following items: a letter that says you are enrolled in a plan, the name of the plan or a copy of your application for the plan.

Area nonprofit develops health insurance plan

By: Charles Slat

Story updated January 10. 2006 11:20AM

The program is meant to provide health coverage for low-income and working poor residents. A plan for small employers also is being discussed.

A program to offer health care to uninsured Monroe County residents is being developed through the efforts of a community coalition.

Called "Monroe County Health Plan" (MCHP), it's a nonprofit corporation formed by the United Way of Monroe County, Mercy Memorial Hospital System, Family Medical Center of Michigan, the Monroe County Board of Commissioners and Monroe County Health Department, Michigan Department of Human Services, Monroe Community Mental Health and Monroe County Chamber of Commerce.

The program initially will leverage about \$500,000 in health-related spending by county government to capture matching federal health care dollars to serve low-income and working poor residents. The hope is it eventually will be expanded to provide low-cost insurance that small employers could afford to offer their uninsured workers.

Under a grant agreement with the state, MCHP initially has begun serving about 500 unmarried, childless Monroe County residents between the ages of 18 and 64 who previously were receiving services under the Michigan's Adult Benefit Waiver program. The Michigan Department of Human Services certifies all qualified individuals.

With the participation of the county, the hospital, the family health center and physicians, MCHP is developing the capacity to provide coverage to an additional 600 uninsured Monroe County residents with income at or below 200 percent of federal poverty level. And plans are being made to start a community-based, premium-subsidized health care program that will be available to small businesses now not providing health care benefits.

"Establishing this plan was a year long process, and the collaboration of the community partners is what has brought it to reality," said Charlotte (Charlie) Mahoney, MCHP chair and immediate past president of the United Way board.

The idea originated with John Pipis, a United Way board member, who brought the potential for the program to the attention of the rest of the board.

The county board of commissioners, at the urging of the United Way and its community partners, supported this "budget-neutral" program and authorized the county health department to participate in the development and administration of the MCHP, recognizing that the program is a major step forward in providing health care services to uninsured county residents.

Initially, the Family Medical Centers in Monroe County — there's one in Temperance and one in Carleton — will provide services, and their physicians will be part of a growing provider network.

In preliminary discussions is the prospect that the program could be expanded to provide basic coverage to uninsured workers with the cost split three ways — a third paid by the worker, the employer and the MCHP.

"We'll only be able to expand it to the degree the dollars are there," Ms. Mahoney said. "The assumption is that as we better understand what we have, we'll reach out to other organizations like the United Way and its agencies."

She said the start of the program is a testament to Monroe County teamwork. "The key is they sat down together as a team and said, 'We need to do something. How do we make it happen?' And they made it happen."

More information about MCHP is available from Larry Zbanek, interim executive director at (517) 482-9236. A presentation on the plan is expected at the Monroe County Board of Commissioners meeting at 7 tonight at the county courthouse.

Letters to the editor

FROM OUR READERS: Mentally ill waiting for care

Detroit Free Press

January 10, 2006

Thank you for your editorial on mental health issues ("Mental Health: Legislators must take up where governor left off," Jan. 3). Gov. Jennifer Granholm was deservedly applauded when she created the state Mental Health Commission. Fifteen months have passed since the commission report. It would benefit the public, the mental health community and the governor if she were to articulate her vision, both short and long term, for mental health care in Michigan.

Concern over the governor's limited response to commission recommendations is not meant to demean the many mental health-related activities of state government. But when the system's focus is on surviving from one day to the next, and there's no long-range plan in place, we can't make a dent in the multitude of problems that led to the governor's establishment of the commission. Instead, we face an unsatisfactory continuation of business as usual.

Mark Reinstein

President and CEO and Member Michigan Mental Health Commission Lansing

Leadership is crucial

As the former cochair of the governor's Mental Health Commission, I appreciate and agree with your Jan. 3 editorial on mental health. For the sake of tens of thousands of Michigan residents who have been diagnosed with serious mental illness and their families, stronger and more effective state policies are essential.

While we all recognize that reforming our severely diminished state-local mental health system will take time and resources, leadership by the governor and the Legislature to support systemic reform in the four directions you noted is both sorely needed and long overdue.

C. Patrick Babcock

Lansing

See full picture

Michigan Mental Health Commission implementation is slow because key elements of recovery are not emphasized, such as person-centered planning and self-determination. However, to state that not enough is being done to promote recovery does not look at some essential facts.

A recovery council consisting of 70 mental health consumers partnered with others in the mental health field was established by the Michigan Department of Community Mental Health. The purpose of the recovery council is exactly to promote recovery and engage in anti-stigma campaigns. Also, a peer support movement has been established to promote peers helping peers in the process of recovery and playing a huge role in developing mental health services. In addition, an independent Mental Health Policy Institute has been established to help look at how to implement Mental Health Commission recommendations.

Steve Ruskin

Oak Park

Families at risk

Your editorial on the ineptness of the mental health system in Michigan was right on the money. Our governor has not responded or put into action the recommendations made by the Mental Health Commission. We need uniform care throughout communities in Michigan. Each county should offer the same services. We need more emphasis on care for our children and our forgotten elderly. There is a severe lack of services for families with children. As you know, they are ending up in the juvenile system.

Families are put in debt for lack of insurance coverage for their loved ones hospitalized with mental illness. Society must realize that mental disease is treatable and would cost less to society if it were recognized as a physical illness like heart disease.

Ann Seleno

Troy

Where's the compassion?

Thank you for your Jan. 3 editorial. The hopes of our family members were raised by formation of the commission. Now, where's the beef? People with mental illness and their families continue to suffer from a broken system. The system is a complex bureaucracy, fragmented by contractors with no real accountability for services. Patient rights are violated with impunity. Jails and prisons are our primary mental institutions. More money won't fix it.

The needs for change include: transformation to a culture of compassion and professionalism; statewide consolidation of business functions, including quality control, information systems, training and program development; a return to fee for service for providers who often receive fixed fees to serve more patients than they can properly handle; and an independent oversight organization with meaningful enforcement authority.

Fred A. Cummins

President Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Oakland County Southfield

Services available at UDM

Thank you for your article addressing the very serious issue of mental health problems among today's college students (Students, staff try to ease strain on campus counseling," Jan. 3).

The University of Detroit Mercy has maintained one of the largest university psychology clinics in the country for more than 30 years. It provides low-cost intensive psychological services to its students, as well as to college students throughout the area. The university is also addressing a variety of specific emotional problems through its PhD program in clinical psychology.

The psychology clinic also serves as a local site for the National Institute of Mental Health's National Depression Screening Day. Services are also available to people in the outside community ages 3 and up.

J. Randy Harms

Interim Director

University of Detroit Mercy

Psychology Clinic

Judy A. McCown

Director of Clinical Training

University of Detroit Mercy

Detroit

2 state troopers charged in attack

Wrongful death lawsuit brought against 2 others

January 10, 2006

BY BEN SCHMITT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Two Michigan State Police troopers were sued for wrongful death and another pair were arraigned in connection with an assault Monday in a tough day for a unit that promotes itself as the elite.

Attorney General Mike Cox announced criminal charges against Gabriel Seibt, 29, and Todd Parsons, 30, in the assault of a 50-year-old homeless man. The troopers allegedly used chemical spray and dumped the man at the State Fairgrounds on June 24.

Meanwhile, the family of a homeless man who was shot and killed by trooper Jay Morningstar last year in Detroit filed a \$10-million lawsuit. He was acquitted last week in a criminal trial.

Now family members of 40-year-old Eric Williams are suing him and his partner, Theresa Malone, the latter for not stopping Morningstar.

Seibt and Parsons are accused of putting Roosevelt Dean Jr. in the back of their squad car after a verbal confrontation in downtown Detroit, then taking him from Greektown to the fairgrounds.

Seibt allegedly sprayed Dean with the state-issued chemical spray before both troopers left him by the side of the road.

Dean was hospitalized and later filed a complaint.

Seibt is charged with misconduct in office and felonious assault with a dangerous weapon.

Parsons is charged with misconduct in office. Both were arraigned in 36th District Court in Detroit. The misconduct charges carry a penalty of up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

The felony assault charge carries a penalty of up to four years and a \$2,000 fine.

Richard Convertino, Seibt's lawyer, declined comment on the charges. Carolyn Henry, Parsons' attorney, did not return calls seeking comment.

State Police said both troopers were suspended without pay Monday.

"The department has worked diligently to earn a reputation for professional and fair conduct, and we will not allow the alleged inappropriate actions of two troopers to sully our relationship with the citizens we serve," said Col. Tadarial Sturdivant, director of the State Police.

Seibt is a 6-year veteran of the State Police, and Parsons has been a trooper for seven years, said Capt. Robert Clark, commander of the 2nd district headquarters in Northville.

Clark said troopers patrol Detroit's freeways, and on occasion ride through Greektown for meals or related police business. He said it is not policy to transport unruly homeless people away from Greektown.

The lawsuit against Morningstar and Malone includes counts of gross negligence and wrongful death. Williams was unarmed and his pants were at his knees at the time Morningstar shot him April 14 in front of the Detroiter Bar.

"They will be held accountable; they are not the untouchables," said attorney Johnny Hawkins, who along with attorney Arnold Reed is representing Williams' family.

A Wayne County jury acquitted Morningstar, 35, last Thursday of second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Contact **BEN SCHMITT** at 313-223-4296 or schmitt@freepress.com. Staff writer Chris Christoff contributed.

REPORT NO. --, VOLUME 35
Michigan Report

STATE TROOPERS CHARGED IN ASSAULT

Two State Police troopers have been charged by Attorney General Mike Cox with assaulting a homeless man in Detroit last summer. The two, Gabriel Seibt and Todd Parsons have turned themselves in and have been placed on unpaid suspension pending the outcome of the case.

Mr. Seibt and Mr. Parsons both were charged in Detroit District Court with misconduct in office, which carries maximum penalties of up to five years in prison and fines of up to \$10,000. Mr. Seibt was also charged with felonious assault with a dangerous weapon, which carries a maximum penalty of four years in prison and fines of up to \$2,000.

The charges stem from a June 25, 2005 incident with Roosevelt Dean Jr. The two encountered Mr. Dean who was on foot in the Greektown area of Detroit. They then transported him to an area near the State Fair grounds, removed him from the cruiser and sprayed Mr. Dean with a state issued chemical spray. Mr. Dean required medical attention.

The State Police investigated the incident and turned over their findings to Mr. Cox.

State Police Director Col. Tadarial Sturdivant said the State Police is, "committed to protecting the dignity and rights of all persons. The department has worked diligently to earn a reputation for professional and fair conduct and we will not allow the alleged inappropriate actions of two troopers to sully our relationships with the citizens we serve."

And Mr. Cox said, "Anyone who commits acts such as those alleged in the complaint should be punished."

The charges come less than a week after another State Police trooper was cleared of murder charges involving the shooting of another homeless man in the Detroit area.

MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2006

Published January 10, 2006

Unique housing built for disabled: Alison House project offers independence to those with disabilities

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

DELTA TWP. - It took longer than she had hoped, but today Sue Kamens will see the results of an idea she had in 1998 begin to take shape.

Ground will be broken this afternoon for Alison House, a 14-unit apartment building in Delta Township designed so people with physical disabilities will be able to live independently.

"Our daughter went to a camp for people with physical disabilities, and they had a reunion every Christmas," she said.

"We saw them grow up. We began to realize they were all still living with their parents - although they were in their early 20s - because there was no place for them to live on their own."

Kamens and her husband, the Rev. Alan Kamens, retired pastor at Grace Lutheran Church, began pursuing the idea of trying to establish such a facility after their daughter Alison, then 23, died in 1997. She had muscular dystrophy and spent her life using a motorized wheelchair.

The Kamenses took the idea to Lutheran Social Services Michigan, which told them to gather information on the need for such a facility and to present it to its board.

They formed a group that included people with disabilities, physical therapists and others interested in helping with the project.

"We probably wouldn't have known about the problem if not for our experiences with Alison," Alan Kamens said.

In 2000, the Lutheran Social Services Michigan Board approved hiring a consultant to write an application for a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

It took two tries, but HUD approved a \$1,158,000 grant for construction and operating subsidy in 2002. They found the land in 2003. Plans were made for a facility that would open in summer 2004.

However, a wetland issue had to be resolved, and that took time, eventually requiring assistance from the office of U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing.

Now all of the hurdles have been cleared, and construction can begin. Lutheran Social Services decided to name the new building after Alison Kamens - although the Kamenses did not suggest it.

"It's really the culmination of a long-held hope and dream that this type of housing can be built to serve a segment of our population that in many ways has been forgotten," Sue Kamens said.

"This will be truly independent living for people who are typically wheelchair bound," said Bill Lutz, housing director for Lutheran Social Services Michigan. "These will be people who need accessibility, not necessarily support."

Shirley Jones of Lansing, a member of the Alison House board of directors, hopes to become one of the facility's first residents.

Jones, who lives in Riverfront Apartments, has used a wheelchair since a car crash 35 years ago. She knows the frustrations of trying to live in an apartment not designed for people with disabilities and said designers should consult someone with disabilities.

"They don't make the bathrooms big enough, and the hallways aren't wide enough," she said.

"I feel something like Alison House is long overdue and hope it will be the first of many such facilities."

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach@lsj.com.

City may sell land for senior housing

By JAN GRIFFEY / Niles Daily Star

Tuesday, January 10, 2006 10:41 AM EST

NILES - A Mishawaka, Ind.-based company wants to purchase about 7.7 acres of undeveloped city-owned land and construct on it 40 duplex rental units in 20 buildings for senior, low-income residents.

The Sterling Group specializes in developing multi-family housing in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Michigan. Locally, the company operates Main Street Village, an upscale community in Mishawaka, as well as The Arbors at Ironwood, affordable apartments for families in South Bend, Ind.

The undeveloped acreage is located north of North 11th and 12th streets off of Lake Street and behind North Niles Villa apartments off of North Fifth Street.

City Administrator Terry Eull said the city purchased the property "many years ago" to have as a potential site for a well field and pump house.

However, it hasn't needed that to date.

If the city council chooses to sell the property to Sterling, Eull said the city would retain some of the property in the event it needs to develop the well field and pump house sometime in the future.

"The city owns several parcels of property like this one. You don't need all that land to do that. About an acre is what you'd need," he said.

No purchase price has been determined for the property. Eull said he will seek an appraisal of its value. City Council members, while not voting on the project, seemed to embrace the proposal on Monday night at a committee of the whole meeting held prior to the council's regularly-scheduled meeting.

In addition to seeking to purchase the property from the city, the company wants the city council to grant is a PILOT - Payment in Lieu of Taxes. That move would allow the company to pay 10 percent of its rent revenues instead of making a tax payment. Kent Heckaman, vice president of development for The Sterling Group, estimated that payment would be about \$21,500 annually.

Heckaman said the company would spend about \$4.3 million constructing the development here. He said the one- and two-bedroom units would each include a one-car attached garage. The company proposes to construct 10 one-bedroom units and 30 two-bedroom units. Only those 55 and older with moderately low incomes - \$13,000 for a single senior and \$30,000 for a couple - would be eligible as renters.

Heckaman estimated that rent for a one-bedroom unit would run between \$307 and \$500 a month and rent for a two-bedroom unit would run between \$376 and \$575.

Heckaman said the project would be constructed using private funds. However, Eull said the incentive to undertake the project is the tax credits offered by the State of Michigan for the development of housing for low-income residents. The Sterling Group, if granted the tax credits, would sell those credits.

Eull said competition for the tax credits is fierce.

"There is a possibility this may not happen," he said. "If you recall, about three years ago the council approved one of these developments for property on Marmont Street and that company didn't get the tax credits and that one just went away."

Eull said the sale of the property would hinge on the company successfully securing the Michigan tax credits.

Board expels girl, 12, accused of bomb threats

Chippewa Valley rules she violated code of conduct

PUBLISHED: January 10, 2006

By Mitch Hotts
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The Chippewa Valley school board voted unanimously Monday to expel a middle school student accused of making a bomb threat in e-mail messages sent to her friends over the Internet.

School board members said the expulsion means the 12-year-old girl cannot attend classes at Wyandot Middle School in Clinton Township through the end of the school year in June and is banned from attending any district-related events.

The girl, who also faces criminal charges, did not attend the school board's hearing but was represented by her mother, who left out a side door before the board finished its deliberations.

Henry Chiodini, the school board president, said the expulsion was difficult because of the girl's age and the likelihood that she sent the message as a joke. Her name was not released because of her age.

Chiodini said the board had a duty to send a message to the school community "based on our expectation of safety for all of our students."

After meeting in a closed session with administrators for 45 minutes, the school board determined the female student had violated Chippewa Valley's code of conduct.

Board member Frank Bednard said the girl was guilty of threatening staff and students, making false reports and false alarms, making a bomb threat and disruption of the education process.

School officials launched a lockdown process in the days after the threat and searched many children entering the school building.

Superintendent Mark Deldin said the girl will have the chance to be reinstated to the district in the summer.

"Whether or not the student will do that remains to be seen," Deldin said. Clinton Township police said the girl made the threat in December before going to a party where her friends discussed receiving the anonymous message. A student later told her mother, who then contacted police. A computer forensic detective was able to track down the student's e-mail address and identity.

The girl was immediately suspended once police identified her. She still

faces charges of using a computer to commit a false report, a 20-year felony if the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office charges her as an adult. Detective Capt. Bruce Wade said the case has not yet entered the juvenile court system.

It's the second time Chippewa Valley has expelled a student for making bomb threats on the Internet. Andrew Osantowski was thrown out in 2004 for threatening a massacre in an incident that gained nationwide attention. Police discovered numerous weapons in his home. Osantowski is now serving a prison sentence after being convicted.

Woman guilty in storm scam

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

By Paul Janczewski

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Gwendolyn D. Jones told a judge she lied to the local chapter of the American Red Cross about being a victim of Hurricane Katrina and about being there when the storm hit the Gulf Coast last August.

Jones, 36, of Flint pleaded guilty Monday to false pretenses over \$1,000 but less than \$20,000, a 5-year felony.

Police said Jones told Red Cross officials she lost everything when she evacuated her Gulf Coast home in Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina. She received a check for \$1,565 to help her and her children.

But an anonymous tip surfaced that Jones had been living in Flint for about a year, and used the disaster to get money from the local relief fund.

Flint police discovered that Jones had been collecting \$241 per month from the Family Independence Agency and living in Flint for nearly a year.

Under a deal struck with prosecutors, Jones will not be charged as a habitual offender because of an earlier felony conviction, which would have added time to any sentence she receives.

Jones also will be required to pay back the agency.

Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille scheduled a Feb. 27 sentencing for Jones.

Jones, who remains free on a \$5,000 personal bond, was born in Flint but lived in Mississippi for 10-15 years, court records indicate. She is on a maternity leave from a Family Dollar store and has five children.

Jones had a Mississippi state identification card when she applied for the assistance, police said. Court records also indicate Jones faces jail time if she does not pay \$191 in fines and costs stemming from a 2001 theft of money and merchandise from the J.C. Penney store in Courtland Center, where she worked.

She has paid back \$1,232, police and prosecutors said.

Court records also indicate Jones is on probation from a larceny conviction in Baton Rouge, La.

Detroit Free Press

January 10, 2006

SOUTHFIELD

**Free tax help offered for
low-income residents**

Southfield's Human Services Department announced this week it will offer free tax preparation assistance for low-income residents from Feb. 1 to March 29.

The service is available to Southfield residents whose annual income is \$20,000 or less and families whose annual income is \$38,000 or less.

This service will be by appointment only, 9 a.m.-1:30 p.m. every Wednesday beginning Feb. 1.

For an appointment, call the Human Services Department at 248-796-4540 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

By Gina Damron

ACLU to defend cohabitation

Web-posted Jan 10, 2006

Divorced dad case puts state's 1800s sex laws into spotlight

By CAROL HOPKINS
Of The Oakland Press

A divorced Ferndale man who has had child-visitation restrictions placed on him by the courts because of a live-in girlfriend, is getting help from the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan.

"I am very grateful for the support given by the ACLU," said Christian Muller, the 35-year-old man who shares legal custody of his two daughters with his ex-wife.

"They have reinstated hope for my family."

In late December, the ACLU sent an appeal on behalf of Muller to the Michigan Supreme Court. The case began when Christian Muller divorced his wife, Nicolette, in 2003.

Christian Muller, an account manager with a trade consulting firm, was granted visitation rights with the couple's two young daughters, both under 10.

After the divorce, Muller's ex-wife asked an Oakland County circuit court judge to forbid Muller from having overnight visitation with his children when his girlfriend, Michelle Moon, was present.

Moon, who lives at the Muller home, has known Christian Muller for several years, he said. He has stated in court documents she does not want to marry at this time.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien ordered that neither parent was to have overnight visitation with the children when they had unrelated guests of the opposite sex stay overnight. Moon complies with the ruling by sometimes staying in a van outside the house.

"By forcing the woman that I share my life with to leave our home sends the message that daddy is doing something bad, daddy is doing something morally wrong," said Muller. "This court order undermines my rights as a parent, as an adult, and as an American with the right to choose how to live my life." The decision was based on a 19th century law outlawing cohabitation.

Muller appealed the case and, last October, the Michigan Court of Appeals let the order stand.

Muller wanted to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court himself, but said he had reached a point where the task was "overwhelming, and the ACLU's intervention at that point was invaluable to any continued hope for justice," he said.

The ACLU believes the court is relying on an outdated law.

"The court is using an antiquated law that criminalizes 'lewd and lascivious cohabitation' to determine if an unmarried couple is allowed to live together," said Wendy Wagenheim, communications director with ACLU of Michigan.

Wagenheim added that although the state repealed its prohibition on marriage between the races in 1883, the prohibition against unmarried cohabitation remained. Michigan is now one of only seven states that retain this provision. "The law being used wasn't part of determination of custody," she said. "It has been just thrown in out of left field." The issue of cohabitation affects many couples. According to the U.S. Census, the ACLU notes, there are now 5.5 million cohabiting households in the United States, and 39 percent of these households have children under 18.

"The state should not be able to interfere with a child custody matter unless the best interest of the child is not being met," Wagenheim said.

"In this case, it's just not true."

Muller sees a chance to affirm that the "decision to marry is personal, not judicial, and that the best interest of the children is the standard upheld in child custody cases," he said.

Muller noted he has received a number of calls and e-mails from people who are in similar situations.

"Most people seem to be supportive of us," he said.

Muller said the "Dateline NBC" TV show is reviewing the family's story.

"With any luck we'll establish to America what is really going on here," he said.

"Maybe then the state Legislature will see the harm that can be caused by leaving this unconstitutional and archaic law lying around to be used to impede on the privacy of another."

PUBLISHED: Monday, January 9, 2006

United Way to almost hit goal

By JEREMY H. DICKMAN
Sun Community Editor

Having set a goal of \$500,000 for this year's "What Matters Is You" campaign, the United Way of Isabella County has reached 80 percent of that mark.

With three weeks to go in the campaign, Executive Director Nichole Bliss said the prospects of making that goal don't look too good.

"It does not look like we are going to reach the \$500,000 mark at this point, but we still have campaigns to report in," Bliss said. "We do expect to be close to what we raised last year (\$475,000), which was significantly higher than in year's past."

One of the reasons for the lower amount raised is a drop in some of the divisions.

"We did have a significant decline this year from our Professional and Small Business Division and we are not sure of the reason why," Bliss said.

Concluding at the end of January, the United Way campaign has 23 partner agencies that it helps to support.

"We always ask that our agencies submit proposals that are reflective of the true costs that they need to conduct their programs," Bliss said.

Although they may not reach their goal, Bliss said the campaign has still been successful.

Out of 60 campaigns, 22 of those have increased their giving, while the United Way has also received four new campaigns this year, Bliss said.

"Overall, we feel very well about our campaign considering the monies that went out of this community for natural disasters, closing of businesses, and the increase for many with health care coverage."

Of the various groups taking part in the campaign, the most successful was the Leadership Division, which is a gift of \$1,000 or more, and Central Michigan Community Hospital, where giving was up nearly \$5,000 over last year.

"We have so many people that dedicate a great deal of time to this effort including our Board of Directors, campaign cabinet and our internal company coordinators," Bliss said. "These folks give their time, talent and treasure to make sure that the health and human service programs in this community are there to assist those in need."

The United Way will distribute funds to the partner agencies Feb. 25 and contributions can still be made to the campaign.

For more information or to make a donation call Bliss at 773-9863.

Published January 10, 2006

Schneider: Lansing cabbie picks people up in more ways than one

By John Schneider
Lansing State Journal

A man who identified himself only as "Moose" phoned the State Journal last week to brag about his big-hearted colleague at Spartan Yellow Cab, Wing Dot Lum.

Lum told me Monday that he wanted neither publicity nor credit for what he did one night last week, but I squeezed the details out of him nonetheless.

Lum, 69, is a retired restaurateur. He ran Foo Ying in various locations around town until 1980. Now he drives a cab three or four shifts a week because, first, it's better than doing nothing and, second, it's a good way to meet people who need help.

Take last Wednesday. Lum was dispatched to pick up a family at the Volunteers of America shelter, which was full, and take them to the local American Red Cross office for emergency assistance.

That's how Lum met Jimmy Horsley, his fiancée Tamekila Wansley, and their 6-month-old son, Monterro. They came to Lansing from Biloxi, Miss., in hopes that the job opportunities would be more plentiful here. So far, it hasn't worked out that way.

"They thought they had a connection in Lansing, but it didn't come through for them," Lum said. "They have nothing."

Food and shelter

The Red Cross gave the family a voucher for one night at Lansing's Deluxe Inn. On the way to the hotel, Lum pulled up to the drive-through window at Rally's and bought the couple \$16 worth of chicken and cheese-covered french fries.

"They were hungry," he said.

At the Deluxe Inn, he reached into his pocket again to pay the difference between the Red Cross voucher and a week's stay at the hotel.

The next day, Lum took the couple to Meijer, where he bought them diapers and other necessities.

A change of luck

On Monday, I caught up with Jimmy Horsley in Room 230 at the Deluxe Inn. He said he had come to Lansing "looking for a new way of life."

Meeting Lum was, Horsley said, a rare bright spot in a streak of dark days.

"This man didn't know anything about us, and yet he helped us out," he said. "Nobody's ever been that nice to me. I guess it was the grace of God working."

Horsley said he's looking for work but that he doesn't know where he and his family will go after Thursday. Whatever happens, he'll never forget the night a cab driver in Lansing picked up his family.

Asked why he did it, Lum said: "I don't know. I do crazy things. If I wasn't going to help them, who would? Where were they going to go in the middle of the night?"

Lum admitted that it wasn't the first time he's given a passenger more than a ride, and it won't be the last. It's kind of a hobby for him.

Lum's four children are grown up, and his wife, he said, supports his freelance charity 100 percent.

"I don't like to loaf," he said.

He could golf or walk in circles at the mall. But Lum has a bad knee and a taste for helping strangers. So he cruises around Lansing in his cab, looking for opportunities.

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Include your name, phone number, city or township. For past columns, visit www.lsj.com/columnists.

This Week in Washington

For the week ending 1/6/2006, Vol. XXVII, No. 1

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 - [Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill Becomes Law](#)
 - [Defense Spending Bill Cuts Domestic Programs by 1 Percent, Drops Emergency LIHEAP Funds](#)
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Budget Reconciliation Bill Awaits Final House Action

On December 21, the Senate passed the conference report for S. 1932, the Deficit Control Act of 2005, by a vote of 51–50, with Vice President Cheney casting the tie-breaking vote. The legislation makes major changes in a number of public human service programs, including Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child support, and child welfare. The final measure does not reduce funding or change policies for the Food Stamp Program (FSP), although the House version did contain FSP cuts. Before the final Senate vote, the Senate parliamentarian agreed with a point of order raised by Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) calling for removal of several reports in the bill. The approved bill therefore now differs slightly from the House version, passed December 19, and must go back to the House for another vote. The House is scheduled to reconvene on January 31.

Among the bill's major provisions are the following:

- Reauthorizes TANF and applies work participation rates and work requirements to recipients in separate state programs.
- Maintains separate two-parent work rates; maintains the work rate at 50 percent but revises the caseload credit to look back to fiscal year 2005 rather than FY 1996; and adds a new state penalty if states do not establish and maintain work verification procedures.
- Increases child care funding by \$1 billion and provides \$1 billion in new Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding for FY 2007.
- Institutes a new \$25 child support user fee; eliminates the ability of states to use child support incentive grant funds to match federal dollars; and includes a series of child support changes from House and Senate TANF proposals.
- Leaves in substantial changes to the language on third-party liability and Targeted Case Management (TCM) that concerned states; the TCM language would prohibit certain foster care services from being covered by Medicaid's TCM.
- Eliminates child welfare administrative claims for most otherwise-federally eligible children in unlicensed foster homes and for children in ineligible facilities such as detention centers, psychiatric and medical hospitals, and institutions with more than 25 beds. Both provisions have certain exceptions.
- Imposes a new requirement to conduct foster care candidacy redeterminations every six months in order to continue claiming administrative funds.
- Reverses the *Rosales v. Thompson* decision by limiting the determination of eligibility for IV-E foster care maintenance and adoption assistance for children placed with relatives.

In Medicaid, the bill would make the following major changes:

- Modifies the way in which pharmaceutical pricing is calculated.
- Increases the asset transfer look-back period from three to five years and changes the penalty period to begin at the time of application.
- Allows states to set up different benefit packages for selected beneficiary groups.
- At state option, allows states to enforce cost-sharing and premiums for certain beneficiaries.
- Increases federal programs designed to cut “waste, fraud, and abuse” in Medicaid programs by establishing additional programs and audits.
- Restricts the use of State Children’s Health Insurance Program funds to cover adults without dependents.
- Requires that individuals present documentation proving citizenship prior to enrolling in Medicaid.
- Provides for some expansion of services for individuals with disabilities, including Money Follows the Person, Cash and Counseling, and psychiatric treatment for children.
- Changes the definition of TCM, case management services, and third-party liability.
- Provides for 10 months of 100 percent Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage coverage for states that applied for Katrina 1115 waivers.

A link to the complete bill text is available on the House Rules Committee web site at <http://www.rules.house.gov/>.

Because of uncertainty over final passage of the budget reconciliation bill before the TANF authorization expiration date of December 31, 2005, the House and Senate passed by unanimous consent a three-month extension of the program, the TANF and Child Care Continuation Act of 2005 (H.R. 4635). In addition to extending TANF, the legislation extends supplemental grants to states, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, transfer authority from TANF to the Social Services Block Grant, and child welfare waiver authority through March 31, 2006.

Labor-HHS Appropriations Bill Becomes Law

On December 30, President Bush signed the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education Appropriations bill into law as P.L. 109-149. The Senate had approved the conference report for the measure (H.R. 3010) on December 21 by attaching it to the Defense appropriations bill, H.R. 2863. On December 22, the House also approved the conference report. The bill provides \$142.5 billion in discretionary funding. In the area of health, it increases rural health spending by \$90 million; provides \$9 million for a research and policy program; and provides \$39 million for a grant outreach program. Overall, the bill would provide \$105 billion more than in FY 2005, a 21 percent increase mostly stemming from additional funding for mandatory Medicaid and Medicare programs. H.R. 3010 also provides \$2.2 billion for LIHEAP.

Defense Spending Bill Cuts Domestic Programs by 1 Percent, Drops Emergency LIHEAP Funds

The Defense appropriations bill has also been signed into law as P.L. 109-148. The measure contains a 1 percent across-the-board cut to all domestic spending programs (except veterans programs), which is in addition to the changes in the Labor-HHS legislation and the pending budget reconciliation bill. An earlier version of the Defense bill contained \$2 billion in additional LIHEAP emergency funding, but the funding was deleted.

Medicaid Commission to Meet January 24-26

On December 30, HHS announced the Medicaid Commission’s meeting notice for January 2006. The

commission will meet at the Holiday Inn Washington-Chevy Chase on January 24 at 6:00 p.m., and will begin at 9:00 a.m. each day on January 25 and January 26. The commission will discuss long-term recommendations on the future of the Medicaid program. Discussion may include the following issues:

- Eligibility, benefit design, and delivery;
- Expanding the number of people covered with quality care while recognizing budget constraints;
- Long-term care;
- Quality of care, choice, and beneficiary satisfaction; and
- Program administration.

The announcement appeared in the December 30 issue of the Federal Register (70 FR 77395-77396), and is available at

<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20051800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2005/E5-8097.htm>.

Two Reports Released on Caseworker Visits with Foster Children

On January 5, the HHS Office of the Inspector General released two reports titled State Standards and Capacity to Track Frequency of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care and State Standards and Practices for Content of Caseworker Visits With Children in Foster Care. The reports assessed the written standards that states have implemented for frequency and content of caseworker visits with foster children. The first report also looked at the extent to which states could provide automated reports and if those reports indicated that children were visited. The recommendations from this report included that the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) should promote the development of automated data systems in states with limited or nonexistent automated capacity and that ACF should work with states to ensure that visitation data are recorded in the automated systems. The second report looked at state caseworker visit practices. The conclusion indicated that the information in the report has never been provided on a national level and, therefore, it may be useful to ACF in reviewing state activities and helping states improve foster care programs. Both reports are available at <http://oig.hhs.gov/w-new.html>